

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 03891 071529Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----046771 071814Z /45

P 071500Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8694
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 3891

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJ: PRESIDENT'S HEALTH WATCH

REF: DAMASCUS 3751, 3665, 3652

1. SINCE INITIAL REPORT (DAMASCUS 3652) RAISING QUESTION OF PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD'S HEALTH, HE HAS ENGAGED IN PUBLIC ACTIVITIES ALMOST DAILY, INCLUDING SEVERAL PUBLIC CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES. IN FACT, ASSAD HAS HAD A HIGHER PUBLIC PROFILE OVER PAST WEEK THAN IS NORMAL. HE APPEARED SOMEWHAT SLIMMER BUT OTHERWISE IS ACTIVE AND IN GOOD SPIRITS. EFFECT OF PRESIDENTIAL ACTIVITIES HAS BEEN TO PUT A DAMPER ON SPECULATION THAT HE IS SUFFERING FROM MAJOR ILLNESS. RUMOR MANUFACTURERS HAVE STARTED CASTING ABOUT FOR SOME OTHER EXPLANATION FOR ASSAD'S UNCHARACTERISTIC RETREATS FROM PUBLIC VIEW OVER PAST MONTH.

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2. INSOFAR AS WE CAN TELL, ASSAD'S PERFORMANCE OF HIS DUTIES IS IN NO WAY IMPAIRED. THROUGHOUT PAST FEW DAYS OF LEBANON CRISIS, ASSAD HAS BEEN CLEARLY IN CONTROL; SHOOTING HIS WAY TO THE POINT OF CRISIS AND PULLING BACK AT THE BRINK. HE HAS DEMONSTRATED HIS ABILITY TO MAKE RAPID AND FORCEFUL DECISION UNDER STRESS. WHEN USG RAISED POSSIBILITY OF UNSC MEETING ON LEBANON EVENING OF JULY 6, KHADDAM CONSULTED

WITH PRESIDENT WHO IMMEDIATELY PLAYED CARD OF THREATENING
ADF WITHDRAWAL FROM BEIRUT. WHILE WE DON'T LIKE WHAT HE HAS
DONE TO EAST BEIRUT, HIS ACTIONS, THUS FAR, GIVE NO GROUNDS
FOR SUSPECTING PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT.

3. IN SPITE OF THE ABOVE EVIDENCE, WE CANNOT DISPEL THE
NAGGING FELLING THAT SOMETHING MAY BE WRONG AND WE WILL
CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION ACCORDINGLY. IF ASSAD
HAD ANY ILLNESS THAT COULD BE EXACERBATED BY PHYSICAL AND
EMOTIONAL STRESS, THE PAST WEEK MUST HAVE TAKEN ITS TOLL.
WE CAN ONLY PRAY THAT, IF ASSAD CONTINUES TO ENGAGE IN
BRINKMANSHIP, HE DOES NOT DO SO AFFLICTED BY ILLNESS-
INDUCED EXHAUSTION WITH ITS CONSEQUENT RISK OF MIS-
CALCULATIONS.
PELLETREAU

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENT, HEALTH
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC03891
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780279-0592
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780787/aaaacvfi.tel
Line Count: 77
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2a66e779-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 DAMASCUS 3751
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2091228
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT'S HEALTH WATCH
TAGS: PINS, SY, (AL-ASSAD, HAFIZ)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2a66e779-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014